



Photos by Joshua Bessex — The Daily Astorian

Waiting on the river

The Daily Astorian

More than 10 ships were waiting to go upriver Thursday, likely because of port shutdowns during the labor dispute with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. According to Ship Finder at www.dailyastorian.com/da/ship-watch this morning, there were more than 40 cargo vessels moored between Portland and the Mouth of the Columbia, with nine (including the Bunun Fortune) in front of Astoria.

Pacific Maritime Association members announced Wednesday they were shutting down vessel operations Thursday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday to avoid paying longshoremen with holiday or weekend pay.



Waldorf: Building was built after devastating fire of 1922

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footprint to Taylor's Organizing for Astoria page — quietly popped up late last year.

Intrigued, preservationists led separate tours of the Waldorf with a prominent local developer and an architect who each saw potential in rehabilitating the derelict building.

The Lower Columbia Preservation Society and others have appealed to the City Council not to raze the Waldorf. In conversations, on social media and in letters to the editor, the momentum appears to have shifted over the past few months toward the belief that the hotel should be spared as a slice of the city's historic downtown.

"Over the last 30 years, this town has done amazing things. And I don't see that we're done with our work," said John Goodenberger, a historic buildings consultant. "There have been buildings that have been rehabilitated that we never thought would happen."

Goodenberger said the li-

brary renovation does not have to be linked to the Waldorf's demolition. He said the library could expand into its basement, its parking lot, the Elks building next door, or another location. The library could also move into the first floor of the Waldorf and let the upper floors of the hotel remain.

"When I look at the Merwyn, I think about the fact that it has this potential that I'm not giving up on," he said. "I'm not giving up on Astoria. I'm not giving up on Astoria's revitalization."

Goodenberger said the Waldorf has had a reputation of being "unsavable, whether that's accurate or not."

"So as long as that reputation is there, you're scaring away potential private development."

From the ashes

Built in 1926 during Astoria's rebirth after the devastating fire of 1922, the four-story Merwyn is considered one of the best examples of Late Commercial style with Renaissance



Photo by Jeff Daly

This is the view from a room on the third floor. The library roof is in the foreground. Almost all of the rooms on the west side of the hotel have a view of the river and the Astoria Bridge.

detailing in the downtown historic district.

Long past its prime, the hotel was renamed the Waldorf in 1980 and used for low-cost housing until it tumbled into disrepair and was closed for code violations in 1989.

Over the past 25 years, the troubled North Bend nonprofit

A'Toll Inc., the city through the Community Action Team, and the Clatsop County Housing Authority looked at different scenarios for the Waldorf that never penciled out.

The options included low-income housing, student housing, a senior center with senior housing, and a condo-

minium or boutique hotel with office space.

During the same time frame, private developers restored the Hotel Elliott, the Commodore Hotel and the Norblad Hotel and Hostel, yet no private developer has taken a chance on the Waldorf.

Renovation costs for the Waldorf, now owned by Groat Brothers Inc., a transportation and demolition firm in Washington state, are estimated at \$4 million to \$5 million.

A California family that had owned the Waldorf wanted the Groat Brothers to tear down the hotel in 2012 — and the city was interested in acquiring the leftover property — but the Historic Landmarks Commission rejected the demolition request.

Architects and engineers who have inspected the Waldorf over the years have found that the structural frame is sound but the building is in a severely deteriorating condition.

Portions of the hotel's west wall have rotted and there are reports of significant asbestos

in the basement and walls near steam heating pipes.

Jay Raskin, a Portland architect who has examined the Waldorf and who argued against demolition in 2012, said his first choice would still be to preserve the building.

The downtown historic district, he said, is "all the buildings together, working together. So if you tear something down, it's a tooth missing. It doesn't look right. It ruins the historic character of the downtown."

Preservation, many who have looked at the Waldorf believe, could mean that the hotel might sit vacant and languish for several more years until a public-sector solution is found, the real estate values downtown improve enough to lure private interests, or a wealthy benefactor with imagination steps forward.

"It's hard to do a building like that. I think that's what people need to understand," said Jim Tierney, the executive director of the Community Action Team.

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